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ABSTRACT

The paper presents some basic information on the field of theory, practice, and research in special education in the Federal Republic of Germany. Some discernible trends which might determine future developments are pointed out. Among the areas covered are definition and basic policy of schooling; statistics on handicapped children and special educational service; state action, policy, and official documents; professional training and research; and inclusion of the handicapped and their parents in special educational decision processes. (Author/SBH)

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PRESENT SITUATION AND RECENT TRENDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Rudolf Schindele, July 1978

Contribution to the CEC First World Congress on Future Special Education

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1. Introduction

By the following report on special education in the Federal Republic of Germany I want to give you some basic information on the present state of this field of theory, practice and research in my home country, and to point at some discernible trends which might possibly determine future developments in special education in this country. Trying to briefly characterize the present situation and to interpret possible trends in a certain field implies a lot of problems and shortcomings, especially if you are to do this in a way as scientific and objective as possible. In a pluralistic society a certain professional field like 'special education' is determined by such a variety of historical influences, present practices and innovative movements that you can never be sure to really detect the most characteristic features and long-time trends. Besides, your evaluation and interpretation will always be influenced by your subjective way of perceiving the reality around you, and your personal wishes in respect to future developments. This danger is especially given in a field, which though collectively named by the term 'special education', actually consists of so many and different areas of action and research - devoted to specific groups of handicaps and/or special educational needs - that the professional competence of a specialist will never cover the whole field, but be concentrated on only one small part of it.

What I can offer you, is, therefore, only a description and interpretation

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based on an analysis of recent literature, but given by a person whose competence is necessarily limited, and whose perceptions and judgements may be influenced to a considerable degree by the fact that he himself is a part of the situation and process described, and, therefore, also has his very personal hopes and wishes in respect to the future development of special education in his country.

2. Some characteristics of the present situation of special education in the Federal Republic of Germany

2.1 Definition and Basic Policy of Schooling

According to one of the most recent half-official definition in the Federal Republic of Germany persons are to be regarded "as educationally handicapped. . ., if their learning. their social behaviour, their communication by language, or their psychomotoric abilities are impaired to such a degree that their participation at the life of the society is essentially impeded. They, therefore, need special educational support." (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974, 32).

This special educational support is presently given exclusively in segretated special residential or day schools (or classes). "Handicapped persons of school age are according to their handicap educated in schools for the blind, the deaf, the trainable mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, the educable mentally retarded (and learning disabled), the hard of hearing, the partially sighted, the speech handicapped, and the behaviourally disturbed (and antisocial)." (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974, 19). As the cultural and educational authority in my country lies with the 11 Federal States, the decision whether a child is to be regarded as "in need of special schooling" is taken according to corresponding regulations in the respective states. In general the decision "whether a child has to attend a special school

and which kind of special school he has to visit is taken by the local school authorities, after consultation with the parents." (Thust, 1977, 21) Special educational service outside special schools is not provided.

2.2 Statistics on handicapped children and special educational service

Giving exact quantitative data on handicapped children and special educational service in the Federal Republic of Germany is nearly impossible. Available data cannot be regarded as fully comparative or representative, (a) because they are assessed on the background of different concepts or definitions of "impairment", (b) because the methods of statistical assessment are very divergent, and (c) because they all are only based on certain qualitative or quantitative parts of the whole population. (Christian and Huschenbeth, 1976, 12.)

The most recent official data are based on an investigation which was carried through in addition to a micro-census in 1974; about 220 thousand families where thereby asked, whether they had a child with a physical, mental or emotional handicap, and whether this child visits a special school or attends a special residential institution. According to this investigation, based on the subjective judgement of parents, 358 000 children under the age of 16 (i.e. 2,5% of the respective total population) were regarded as physically, mentally or emotionally handicapped, 20,5% of these children were classified as 'physically handicapped', 7,6% as 'chronically ill', 17,2% as 'sensorially handicapped', 5,9% as 'dyslexic', 27,4% as 'emotionally handicapped'. 17% of these children were living in special residential institutions, 58% attended special day schools or special kindergartens. (Christian and Huschenbeth 1976, 14-20)

According to an estimate by the Standing Commission of Ministers for Cultural Affairs the following percentages of handicapped school age children (and number of handicapped children from 6 to 16 years, referred to a total number of 9961900 children of this age in April 1974) should be expected: blind 0,015% (1494), deaf 0,05% (4981), trainable mentally retarded 0,6% (59771), physically handicapped 0,2% (19924), chronically ill 0,3% (29886), educable mentally retarded (or learning disabled) 4% (398476), partially sighted 0,1% (9961), speech handicapped 1,5% (149428), behaviorially disturbed 1% (99619). (Standige Konferenz der Kultusminister, 1972, 8; Christian and Huschenbeth, 1976, 19)

The total number of handicapped children living in the Federal Republic in 1974 can (following this estimate) be expected to amount to 773540, i.e. 7,765% of the corresponding total population. The total number of children getting special educational service (in special schools) was, however in 1973 only about 370000. (Christian and Huschenbeth, 1976, 19) This indicates that in 1973-1974 between 45 and 50% of the handicapped children in the Federal Republic of Germany did not get special educational service. The report of the German Educational Council (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974, 20) supports this assumption, estimating that in 1973 we did not provide adequate educational service to 61% of the trainable mentally retarded, 65% of the physically handicapped, 70% of the hard of hearing, 73% of the partially sighted, 81% of the speech handicapped and 65% of the behaviorally disturbed children in our country.

2.3 State action, policy, and official documents

Many politicians and educationalists, both on the national level and within the various federal states, have for a long time been aware of the fact,

that - though having a well-developed, and effective special school system - our country is not doing enough for the adequate education of all handicapped persons. Various actions and documents, aiming at improving special educational services in the whole of our Federal Republic, reflect such efforts and indicate recent state policy: In 1972 the Standing Commission of Ministers for Cultural Affairs presented its "Recommendation for the Structure of the Special School System". In spite of their very conservative character - only suggestions within the present system of segregated special schools are made - this document had a positive influence on the quantitative and qualitative improvement and the unification of special educational services in our country. (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister, 1972)

Much more innovative initiatives resulted from a half-official document: the Recommendations "Concerning the Educational Furtherance of Handicapped Children and Youth and Children in Danger of Getting Handicapped" issued by the Educational Commission of the German Education Council in 1974. (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974) These Recommendations were based on professional expertises concerning the education of the various groups of handicapped, and special problems like "statistics of the handicapped", "early assessment and care", "social-educational centers", and "vocational education of handicapped adults"; all these expertises were published by the German Education Council, as well. (Back, 1974; Bittner, Inssen, 1974; Ertle and Schmid, 1974; Hudelmayer, 1975; Kanter, 1974; Kautter and Munz, 1974; Knura, 1974; Löwe, 1974; Mersi, 1975; Pechstein, 1977; Sander, 1973; Schönberger, 1974; Schultz-Linkholt, 1978; Solarowa, 1975; Speck, 1973) A deep and long-lasting positive influence of these recommendations and expertises in respect to nearly all "recent trends" in special education in my country can be expected.

In 1975 the Standing Commission of the Ministers of Cultural Affairs installed state wide commissions, which were to develop guidelines for the education at the various special schools for the handicapped. These Guidelines (which certainly will be far away from scientifically based curricula) are presently being discussed by the regular Conference of the Ministers of Cultural Affairs. It can be hoped, that - in spite of the very reduced and restricted form in which they seem to be released by the Conferences - these guidelines will help improve the practical teaching in our special schools and will have an innovating and unifying influence on our special educational system. (Weigt, 1976)

2.4 Professional training and research

Professional training within the area of Special Education in the Federal Republic of Germany is, at present, fully developed only in the area of training of special teachers in schools for the handicapped. University courses in special education are offered at the Universities of Bremen, Frankfort, Geissen, Hamburg, Marburg, Munich, Oldenburg, and Würzburg, and at the Universities of Education at Berlin, Dortmund, Hannover, Heidelberg, Kiel, Cologne, Mainz, Reutlingen, and Saarbrücken. In nearly all these universities the qualification for teaching in one or two kinds of schools for the handicapped can be acquired either by a two-year course in addition to a regular teacher training and some time of practical teaching, or by a four-(or five) year integrated course which comprises curricular elements of both regular and special teacher training and leads directly to the special education diploma and the licence for teaching in special schools (normally after an additional in-service training of one to two years). (see Z.f. Heilpädagogik, No. 6, 1974)

In respect to their organization and curricular content these courses vary according to the policy of the respective federal states and the philosophies of the respective university staff. Some information on topics regarded as professionally important by a majority of university teachers in special education may be drawn from the theme they discussed during their recent yearly conferences: "Special Education in Regular Schools", 1974 (Sander, 1976), "Special Education - Didactics - Theory of Cognition", 1975 (Z.f. Heilpädagogik, No. 3, 1976), "Development of Special Educational Theory - Comparative Special Education", 1976 (Bürli, 1977).

The official function of all these special educational university departments is "training and research" in their respective fields; they all offer post-graduate and Ph.D. courses. Research in the field of special education in our country is, therefore, mainly concentrated in these special educational university departments, as well. Such research is, however also carried through by university departments of related fields, by independent research centers or associations in the field of rehabilitation, and by organizations and associations of or for the handicapped. Adequate financing of special educational research is one of the crucial and still unsolved problems, especially in regard to the smaller groups of handicapped. Research funds are provided by cultural and educational authorities within the federal states and by the Ministry for Youth, Family and Health of the German Federal Government (Paul, 1978). An improving and innovating effect on special educational reserach in our country is expected from the 'program emphasizing special education' which has recently been launched by the German Research Association. (Z.f. Heilpädagogik, No. 9, 1977, 596-599)

2.5 Uncertainties in theory, practice and research in special education

The field of special education in our country - be it in its theoretical, practical or research aspect - can certainly be described as being in an evolutionary (or revolutionary?) state of transition. "Uncertainty" is therby an overall impression which probably best characterizes the present scene. According to Bach (1977b, 8-15) such uncertainties exist in respect to "the name of this discipline, the range of people it has to serve, its objectives, its methods, its institutions, and its way of expressing itself" (p. 8). Uncertainties concerning the relation of special education to closely related fields like general education, social work and rehabilitation, or other related disciplines, could be added to this list. Obvious is also the deep uncertainty of special education and special educators in respect to the problem, how far this field and its representatives should go beyond its own boundaries and take an active influence on all disciplines, decisions and situations by which the special situation of handicapped people in our society is determined.

Bach calls these uncertainties fruitful and productive as they may bring the openness to questions and the sensibility for problems, which are necessary conditions for the enlargement and differentiation of knowledge, and the search for new solutions. I fully agree to this judgment of the uncertainty and uneasiness presently dominant in the field of special education in my country. May be the "recent trends" pointed out in the following chapter indicate in what directions new and better solutions are sought, and will, probably, be found.

3. Recent trends and possible future developments

3.1 A More Comprehensive Concept of Special Education

A more comprehensive theoretical concept of and practical approach to special education is probably the predominant trend in this field in our country; it, therefore, must also be seen in close relationship with most of the other trends, described below.

This extended approach has its origin in the fact that theoretical and practical specialists realize more and more that special education cannot mean to only develop cultural competence in the handicapped child, or to limit this support to a certain age or certain educational settings. On the contrary, special educators feel responsible for the adequate developmental and educational assistance to the exceptional child in all areas of human development and in all stages of this development. They also realize that such help must be given in a variety of educational settings (including kindergartens, hospitals, family home, leisure time groups, working place, and courses for adults) and that it must be extended to all persons in need of such special support. (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974; Bach, 1974; Dietrich, 1978; Hudelmayer, 1975; Mersi, 1975; Pechstein, 1978; Reinhold, 1978; Seifert, Hischer, Wienhues, 1977; Speck, 1973; Zehlthofer, 1976; Zienlniok and Schmidt-Thimme, 1978).

Early assessment and care, extended curricula (including areas like daily living skills, social training, sexual education and prevocational training), realistic vocational training and guidance, adequate preparation for leisure time activities, lifelong further education and (if necessary) intensive aftercare are, thus, becoming substantial areas or objectives of special educational help for the handicapped.

3.2 Special Education Regarded as an Integral Part of Education and Rehabilitation

As indicated above, the school system for handicapped children in Germany has developed rather independently and segregated from the regular school system. Special education as a scientific discipline was too long out of view of normal education, or regarded as a very special and isolated subdivision of general education. (Bleidick, 1978a, 521). An increasing number of general and special educationalists do, however, now point out, that special education must be regarded as fully integrated within the normal process of education, as "education under unusual learning and teaching conditions" (Schindele 1978; see also Kleber 1977a, Kluge 1972; Sander 1976; Marschelke 1977; Schindele 1977, 6-10). At the same time, special education is more and more recognized as an integral part of the total process of rehabilitation (Iben, 1975; Jochheim 1975, 18; Kleber, 1977a; Schindele, 1977 and 1978). Within this area, an increasing number of authors stress the very close relationship between special education and social work. (Bach 1977a, II; Stadler 1977; Kleber 1977a, 18 and 38-41.)

3.3 Stressing of Social Causation of Handicaps and Socio-political Engagement of Special Educators

The more comprehensive concept of special education, its imbeddedness in general education and rehabilitation and its close relation to social work go hand in hand (and are partially initiated by) a strong socio-political engagement of a large number of special educators in the Federal Republic of Germany. The theoretical and philosophical background of this movement is expressed in many publications which point at (and blame) those realities in our society which make unusual conditions of development, education or

life appear as "special", which themselves produce such special conditions, or which increase the negative social or educational effect of objectively given handicaps. (Antor 1976; Hennfeldt 1974; Jantzen 1974; Keckeisen 1976; Seywald 1976; Thenissen 1977; Thimm 1975a and 1975b; Wöhler 1978).

Specialists supporting such philosophies regard this explanation of handicap being a "social product of our society" either as one possible paradigm of the concept "handicap" (e.g., Bleidick 1977; Thimm 1978; Weinläder 1976), or they take it as the starting point of a radical critique of prevailing special educational theories and practices in our country (Aab et al. 1976; Abé et al. 1973; Altstaed et al, 1974; Jantzen 1976 and 1977).

3.4 Movement Towards More Integrated Forms and a More Flexible System of Special Educational Services

One of the most obviously discernible and most controversial trends in special education in my country is one, which in some of your countries has already become reality to a large degree, but which in the Federal Republic of Germany has not gone far beyond the stage of discussion and dispute. It is the effort to get away from our totally segregated school system for handicapped children and to realize more integrated and flexible forms of special educational services, comprising both special schools and special educational support of the handicapped within the regular school setting.

This movement was initiated at the beginning of this decade by specialists who, influenced by experiences with special educational systems in other countries, realized that special educational services in our country have to be offered within more integrated and flexible organizational patterns if they really are to reach all handicapped children in need of such services, if they really want to reach the central objective of social

integration of the handicapped, and if they want to help break the vicious circle of prejudices and inability of interaction by giving both the handicapped and non-handicapped a fair chance of living and learning to live together during the most cruical years of their development and education (e.g., Eberwein, 1970; Löwe, 1972; Möckel, 1970; Muth and Topsch, 1972; Preuss-Lausitz, 1971; Schindele, 1972 and 1973).

The movement for the "education of exceptional children in regular schools (mainstream)" got a lot of support by the recommendations and expertises issued by the German Education Council during the last five years (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1974, 78-95; Hudelmayer, 1975, 108-124; Löwe, 1974, 141-161; Mersi, 1975, 199-215; Speck, 1974, 100-103) by a great number of professional literature, not only from the field of special education (Hellbrügge, 1975; Muth, Kniel, Topsch, 1976; Sander, 1976; Schindele, 1977b; Weigt, 1977) but also from experts from the fields of general education (Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft Gesamtschule, 1976 a and b; Reinartz and Sander, 1977) sociology (Thimm, 1977) and medicine (Pechstein, 1978) and by actions and publications of political or professional associations or interest groups.

In many recent research projects the practicability and effectivity of special educational services in regular schools have been investigated (Kniel, 1978; Pawel, 1977; Schindele, 1975; Schindele, 1977). First practical -- still singular and isolated -- attempts to realize such integrated forms of special educational support have been made in respect to various groups of handicapped in nearly all federal states. (Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft Gesamtschule 1976a and b; Muth et al., 1976; Schindele, 1977a). It can be hoped that official policy and legislation within the federal states will soon be changed in a way that at least large-scale pilot programs of mainstreaming exceptional children can be realized in our country too.

3.5 Inclusion of the Handicapped and their Parents in Special Educational Decision Processes

The tendency to accept the handicapped themselves and their parents as qualified partners in decisions concerning their education can be seen as a consequence of (and reason for) the increasing socio-political engagement of special educators and the strong movement for effective educational and social integration of the handicapped.

Specialists, who really aim at the optimal emancipation and integration of handicapped people within our society realize that such goals can never be achieved by a special education for which the handicapped is only an object that has to be cared for or a person who cannot take decisions about his own life or education himself. The parents or other relatives of handicapped persons are increasingly accepted as adequate partners in realizing optimal education. Many specialists accept the handicapped and their parents not only as partners and helpers, but realize that the actual needs and problems of the handicapped and his family can only be met in close cooperation with these most intimate potential professionals. (Kerkhoff, 1978; Klee, 1975; Klee, 1977; Mertes, 1978; Rheinweiler and Schönberger, 1978).

3.6 Search for More Adequate Special Educational Theories and Philosophies

Intensive search for new theoretical concepts in special education is a logical consequence of the uncertainty which presently prevails in our country in respect to the concept of "impairment" and special educational philosophy. (Bericht über das Kolloquium zum Begriff der Behinderung, 1976; Bleidick, 1977). One of the dominant trends within the corresponding discussion seems to be that the theoretical value and practical applicability of the generalizing concept of "handicapped" and of a "general theory of the education of the handicapped"

(Bleidick, 1977b and 1978) are questioned by more and more specialists. While some authors stress the multidimensionality and multiplicity of handicaps and the special educational theories and practices meeting corresponding educational needs (Bach, 1976; Kobi, 1977), others point out that the practice of generally speaking of "the handicapped" and the efforts to establish a "general special educational theory" are theoretically illogical, of no value for special educational practice, and of detrimental influence on the emancipation and integration of the handicapped within our society. (Schindele, 1975, 22; Schindele, 1977b, 7-9; Schindele, 1978). The comparative and interdisciplinary, the methodologic and structuring function and value of activities which concern various or all groups of exceptional children and/or various areas of special educational needs is thereby, by no means, underestimated.

3.7 More Concentration of Theory and Research on the Actual Process of Teaching Children with Exceptional Educational Conditions

Along with the tendency to quit the theoretical reflection "the handicapped" and "the education of the handicapped" many special educationalists in my country start to concentrate their efforts in theory and research on the actual process of teaching children with certain exceptional conditions or certain special needs. They aim at developing "action-oriented" theory and research (Fachbereich Sonderpädagogik, 1978; Schönberger, 1977) and to thereby analyze and clarify the actual process of teaching certain groups of children with handicaps and/or exceptional educational needs. (Kluge, 1976; Nestle, 1976; Schindele, 1975b). Their efforts go hand in hand with the demand for more adequate research methods and strategies in special education (Deck, 1978; Jussen, 1976; Schindele, 1975; Weinschenk, 1978) with the attempt to extend special educational teaching into areas and contents which assure a realistic, life-and-person-oriented education for the handicapped child

(Apel, 1977; Kleber, 1977a; Nestle, 1977; Westphal, 1976) and with experiments to find new or unusual educational or therapeutical methods to achieve these aims (Pfeiffer, 1976; Nitch, 1976; Wegler and Albert, 1976).

3.8 Concentration on the Problems of Teaching Very Severly and/or Multiply Handicapped Children

The fact that the number of severly and/or multiply handicapped children is steadily increasing and that more and more children with very severe impairment are demanding special educational service has led many theoretical and practical specialists to reflect on the educability of these children, and to develop and try out methods, which assure optimal educational and developmental help for such persons. (Fischer, 1976; Frölich and Tuckermann, 1977; Hartmann, 1973 and 1975; Wenz, 1978). In spite of the great importance of this area of special education is given now, special educational theory, practice and research are still standing somewhat helpless in front of the multidimensional and highly complicated educational problem. A central experience in the search for adequate solutions seems to be that our prevailing practice of specializing and differentiating in special educational teaching only according to the different kinds of handicaps or groups of handicapped must necessarily fail with these children. Maybe this new experience has a positive general influence on special educational theory and practice in our country. This would be the case if the experience with the multihandicapped children made us realize that, educationally, children can never be classified only as "the blind" or "the speech handicapped" or "the mentally retarded", but that each of them has very individual educational and developmental needs -- needs which themselves might often be a better classifying criteria in special education theory and practice.

3.9 Search for More Interdisciplinary and International Communication and Cooperation

Nearly all the trends indicated above make obvious that special education and special educators in my country have lost their long prevailing self-contained security, and that they need all the information and help they can get from specialists in related fields and other countries. Practical solutions for more intensive cooperation and more effective mutual information must still be sought if continuous positive mutual influence is to be assured on an interdisciplinary and international level. (Heese, 1976; Reinartz, 1977; Schindele, 1978; Weinschenk, 1978). The fact that "comparative special education" wae the theme of the yearly meeting of university teachers in special education in German-speaking countries in 1976 (Bürli, 1977) and, if I may say so, the fact that the interdisciplinary and International Journal of Rehabilitation Research has been initiated by special educational experts in my country shows which high value is attributed to interdisciplinary and international cooperation by many representatives of special education in the Federal Republic of Germany.

4. Concluding Remarks

Needless to say, how very pleased I was when I was invited to attend this congress and to report about special education in my country in front of this international audience. For me, staying here is a great professional experience which broadens my knowledge about special education theories and practices in various countries. Should my contribution here have given you some new information on special education in my country and should this report even have increased your interest in more intensive cooperation with special educators from this country, my pleasure to have been here would be even more intense.

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